DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 394 537 JC 960 254

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TITLE Characteristics of Successful Students Readmitted Following Academic Suspension.
PUB DATE 20 May 96
NOTE 18p.
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Academic Ability; *Academic Achievement; *Academic Failure; *Academic Persistence; *Academic Probation; Academic Records; Community Colleges; Grades (Scholastic); High Risk Students; *Predictor Variables; Student Attrition; *Student Characteristics; Two Year Colleges; Two Year College Students
IDENTIFIERS City University of New York Bronx Community Coll

ABSTRACT

In fall 1994, New York's Bronx Community College (BCC) conducted a study of the usefulness of 50 variables in predicting the academic performance of students readmitted to the college following academic suspension. The sample consisted of 86 academically suspended students readmitted to the BCC for fall 1994. The 50 variables examined included scores on the City University of New York placement tests, Maudsley Personality Inventory, Survey of Study Habits and Attitudes, 8 educational history items, 20 biographical data items, and subjects' opinions regarding the contribution of 12 factors to their previous academic failure. Study findings, based on the students' academic performance in the re-entry semester, included the following: (1) of the 55 females in the study, 29 failed their re-entry semester, while of the 31 males, 18 failed; (2) students' past academic performance was found to be unrelated to outcomes for the re-entry semester; (3) biographical items which were positively related to success were marriage, reporting some financial concerns, and being the first born or an only child, while having "loafed" since their previous semester was related to failure; and (4) with respect to reasons for previous failure, students who expressed dissatisfaction with instructors and teaching methods, dissatisfaction with counseling, and too many personal problems were more likely to succeed upon re-entry. Contains 11 references. Data tables are appended. (TGI)

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Characteristics of Successful Students Readmitted Following Academic Suspension

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SUMMARY

The study was an investigation of the usefulness of 50 variables in predicting the academic performance of 86 students readmitted to Bronx Community College following academic suspension. The variables included scores on the City University of New York placement tests, Maudsley Personality Inventory, and Survey of Study Habits and Attitudes. Other variables included eight educational history items, 20 biographical items, and students' opinions about the contribution of 12 factors to their previous academic failure. The criterion measure was the academic performance (pass or fail) in the re-entry semester.

The principal conclusions to be derived from this study are that, for the population of academic failures characterized by average high school achievement and average scholastic aptitude, specific academic skills are important, past academic record seems unimportant, and a general factor called incentive seems important in the attainment of passing grades upon readmission.

CHARACTERISTICS OF SUCCESSFUL STUDENTS READMITTED FOLLOWING ACADEMIC SUSPENSION

The readmission of the student who has failed academically poses a serious problem for the college administrator. There have been few reliable criteria on which to base the readmission decision. Research studies are sparse and spaced far apart across the decades. Boyd et al. (1994) invited readmitted students who were academically dismissed to participate in a summer retention program that emphasized study skills and career exploration. Although the program participants had higher average rates of academic persistence than did the control group, the difference did not reach statistical significance. Paulsen and Stahmann (1973) studied the characteristics of high-risk students readmitted after a semester of probation. The group who graduated had a desire for upward mobility and financial success. These graduates also changed their study habits and study skills in order to succeed. A few studies in the sixties have suggested some attributes which may be discriminative. Dole (1963) and Hansmeier (1965) both found significant relationships between overall GPA prior to dismissal and GPA after readmission, but other investigators have found little or no relation between achievement measures and performance after readmission (Warman, 1965). Campbell and Hahn (1962) found that grades of students who engaged in constructive activities during their absence from college improved more than grades of students who did not. There was no clear-cut relationship between length of absence and improvement. Phelke and Sharp (1965) found that, among probationary transfer students, a) males over age 27 were successful, b) students who had completed between 30 and 60 units tended to be

successful, and c) students who worked more than 20 hours a week were less successful than students who worked 11-20 hours a week. Dole (1963) devised a scale, distilled from a variety of measures, which showed low (.32 to .55) but significant correlations with a pass-fail criterion.

The purpose of the current study is to add to current knowledge about the readmitted academic failure so that eventually some basis for both sound readmission decisions and workable rehabilitation programs may be formulated.

METHOD

The sample consisted of all academically suspended students readmitted to Bronx Community College (BCC) for the fall 1994 semester. Initially 120 students who had applied for readmission were accepted and were asked to participate in this study. Thirty-four students declined to participate leaving 86 students with complete records available for the study.

The sample included 55 females and 31 males; 77 students were single and 9 were married. They had completed a mean of 4.7 semesters of college; their mean overall GPA was 1.56 (4.00 = A) at their semester of suspension. They had been out of college a mean of 12.6 months (at this college there is a general rule that suspended students will be readmitted only after one academic year). The median percentile rank in high school graduating class was 56.

Each subject was required to complete a questionnaire and a test battery which included the Survey of Study Habits and Attitudes (SSHA), the City University of New York (CUNY) Placement tests in English, reading, and mathematics and the Maudsley Personality Inventory (MPI).

Additional data were gathered from the Office of Computer Center and the Registrar's Office.

Fifty variables were generated, including 10 test scores, 8 educational history items, 20 bits of biographical data, and subjects' opinions about the contribution of twelve factors to their previous academic failure. Information collected included the following items (where appropriate, response categories were indicated):

Test Data - CUNY placement data (in English, mathematics and reading); Maudsley Personality Inventory (Extraversion, Neuroticism); and Survey of Study Habits and Attitudes (Delay Avoidance, Work Methods, Teacher Approval, Educational Acceptance, Study Orientation).

Educational History - Semesters completed, this college; Semesters completed, all college work; Credit hours completed, all college work; Overall GPA, this college; GPA last term attended, this college; and Percentile rank in high school graduating class.

Biographical Data - Sex; Civil Status (Single, married living with spouse, single parent, divorced or separated); Type of high school (Public; private; GED); High school curriculum (technical, vocational, academic); Educational aspiration (Leave college as soon as possible, associate degree, bachelor's degree, continue after bachelor's degree, unsure; How spent time since last in college (Worked at a full-time job, loafed, part-time work and/or part-time school); Liked work while absent from college; State of health (Very healthy; in good health; OK, but nothing extra; tired and draggy; sick much of the time); Effect of health (No effect, a little, quite a bit, led directly to failure); Months since last in college; Curricula (terminal or transfer); Reaction to College

(Beneficial, hindrance, don't know); Ability to finance college education (No concern, some concern, major concern); Birth Order (Only, first, second, third, fourth or later); Will you succeed in college? (yes, no); and Do your parents think you will succeed ? (yes, no).

Student Opinions About Previous Academic Failure - For each of the twelve factors listed below, subjects had four response choices. These were (a) Very Important, (b) Important, (c) Minor Importance, and (d) Not Important: Could not get desired program of study; Dissatisfied with instructors or teaching methods; Dissatisfied with academic advisement; Unhappy with major; Dissatisfied with this college; Too many personal problems; Personal health problems; Illness in family or other family health problems; No clearly defined goals; Too many extra-curricular activities; Irregular class attendance; and Did not study enough.

At the end of the Semester term, Ss were divided into two groups on the basis of attained grade point average. A "Pass" group consisted of all Ss who achieved at least a C average (C = 2.0) for the semester, and a "Fail" group consisted of all Ss who failed to achieve a C average. Data were then analyzed to determine whether there were significant differences between the Pass group and the Fail group on each of the 50 variables.

The data obtained were assumed to be of two types, nominal and interval. Nominal data were analyzed using frequency-within-categories and the chi-square test of independence. Where the expected frequency in a cell was less than five, Yates' correction for continuity was used. Where interval data were available, two-tailed t-tests were used to test the difference between means. In addition, point-biserial correlations were calculated for each interval variable. Finally the sample was

partitioned by sex and tests of significance were calculated for each variable for each sex.

RESULTS

Of the 55 females in the study, 26 passed and 29 failed. Of the 31 males, 13 passed and 18 failed. These proportions are not significantly different (Chi = .225, d.f. = 1).

Mean test scores are presented in Table I. Several scales differentiated between successful and unsuccessful students among either males or females. Compared with unsuccessful males, successful males had significantly higher mean scores on Mathematics, SSHA Delay Avoidance, SSHA Educational Acceptance, and SSHA Study Orientation, and significantly lower mean score on MPI Extraversion. Successful females scored significantly higher than unsuccessful females on mathematics and SSHA Work Methods.

The educational history items failed to differentiate between successful and unsuccessful students. These items, which have to do with past academic performance, specifically with grades and amount of credits completed, are apparently totally unrelated to current academic success in this sample. Means are reported in Table II.

Successful and unsuccessful students were significantly different on four of the twenty biographical items. Married males were more successful than single males. Six of six married males passed, while only 20 of 49 single males passed. This was also true of females; three of three married females, while only 12 of 28 single females passed. These data are presented in Table III.

All students who said they loafed since last in college failed, as shown in Table IV.

There was a tendency for females who reported no financial concerns to do more poorly than females who said they did have some concern about finances. The trend for males was in the same direction, although it was not statistically significant See Table V.

There seems to be a relationship between birth order and success; the data are presented in Table VI. Over 50 per cent of only children and first born children passed, and 75 per cent of fourth or later children passed, but a substantial majority of second and third children failed. Although statistical tests for males and females do not reach significance, the test for the total group is significant, and the trend across groups is consistent.

Finally, students were asked for their opinions about factors which may have contributed to their previous academic failure. They were asked whether each of twelve factors was very important, important, of minor importance, or not important. Proportions of responses in each category for students who passed were significantly different from proportions for students who failed, for three of the factors: dissatisfaction with instructors or teaching methods, dissatisfaction with academic advisement, and too many personal problems. The distribution of their opinions are presented in Table VII.

DISCUSSION

The most striking find is the independence of general measures of achievement and success of readmitted group. Success is unrelated to past academic achievement in high school and college, unrelated to amount of

prior college experience, and unrelated to placement scores with the single exception of the CUNY Mathematics subtest for male and female subjects.

Students who score high on extraversion scales have consistently been found to be relatively poor students (Hood, 1977; Owens & Johnson, 1989; Rose & Elton, 1986; Savage, 1982). The present study extends this finding to readmitted students, but only to males. The earlier studies have consistently reported the extraversion effect for both males and females; no explanation is readily apparent for the failure to find the effect among females in the present study. Inspection of the data suggests that the range of scores among females may be somewhat restricted; possibly a larger, more heterogeneous sample might produce the effect, but this is speculation.

The CUNY placement scores and SSHA scores were used in an attempt to measure specific academic skills, and to determine if these skills are related to success. The CUNY placement tests are designed to measure skills in writing, reading and mathematics. The SSHA is designed to measure study skills and study attitudes. The results reflected in Table I suggest that specific skills may be important determinants of success for readmitted students. One of three CUNY placement scores and SSHA scores differentiated between successful and unsuccessful students. However, even though these measures were the best predictors of success for this sample, they did not account for a very large proportion of the variance. Point-biserial correlations were computed for all interval variables; the highest correlations, for SSHA Study Orientation, was only .29. Although significantly different from chance at the .01 level, this

correlation does not suggest a relationship strong enough to permit predictions about the performance of individual students. Clearly, however, further attempts to apply measures of specific skills seem warranted by these results.

Biographical factors which significantly differentiated successful and unsuccessful students seem generally related to a factor which might be labeled incentive. All married males and females passed. It seems plausible that a married male or female student might have more incentive to continue his or her education than an unmarried male or female student. Eight of nine students who reported no financial concerns failed; this might also be called an incentive factor. No student passed who reported he or she had loafed since last in school. A student who reports he or she loafed (regardless of whether he or she actually loafed or not) either has little incentive to succeed or considerable incentive to fail.

The meaning of birth order is not clear. Only children and first children tended to succeed as often as they failed, second and third children tended to fail, and fourth and later children tended to succeed. We have no explanation.

Student opinions about factors which contributed to their failure are not very informative. There is a tendency for students who labeled any of the first five items as Very Important to be successful, but it is not clear whether it has some meaning. This is another area where the present survey suggests that further, more sophisticated research is desirable.

SUMMARY

The study was an investigation of the usefulness of 50 variables in predicting the academic performance of 86 students readmitted to BCC following academic suspension. The variables included scores on the CUNY placement tests, Maudsley Personality Inventory, and Survey of Study Habits and Attitudes. Other variables included eight educational educational history items, 20 biographical items, and students' opinions about the contribution of 12 factors to their previous academic failure. The criterion measure was the academic performance (pass or fail) in the re-entry semester.

The following statistically significant differences were found for successful students:

Total Sample

1. Better study methods as measured by the SSHA.
2. More likely to be fourth or later born, less likely to be second or third born.
3. More likely to report dissatisfaction with instructors or teaching methods, dissatisfaction with academic advisement, or too many personal problems as important reasons for past failure.
4. Did not loaf since last in college.
5. More likely to have concerns about finances.

Males

1. More likely to be married.
2. Higher CUNY Mathematics placement score.
3. Lower Maudsley Extraversion score.
4. Better overall study habits and attitudes as measured by the SSHA.

Females

1. More likely to be married.
2. Higher SSHA Work Methods score.
3. Higher CUNY Mathematics placement score.
4. More likely to show concern about financing a college education.

The principal conclusions to be derived from this study are that, for the population of academic failures characterized by average high school achievement and average placement scores, specific academic skills are important, past academic record seems unimportant, and a general factor called incentive seems important in the attainment of passing grades upon readmission.

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Table I
TEST SCALE MEANS OF MALES, FEMALES AND TOTAL GROUP BY PASS, FAIL

Scale	Males		Females		Total	
	Pass	Fail	Pass	Fail	Pass	Fail
CUNY English	6.30	5.90	6.40	5.80	6.35	5.85
CUNY Mathematics	22.26	19.38*	21.00	18.50*	21.63	18.75*
CUNY Reading	11.50	11.00	12.00	11.70	11.75	11.35
MPI Extraversion	28.58	32.34*	27.77	28.56	28.31	30.89
MPI Neuroticism	22.94	24.34	23.77	23.33	23.21	23.96
SSHA Delay Avoidance	17.62	12.41**	20.23	17.44	18.49	14.34*
SSHA Work Methods	21.27	17.03	26.23	19.94*	22.92	18.15*
SSHA Teacher Approval	27.69	24.79	29.77	25.94	28.38	25.23
SSHA Educational Acceptance	23.12	19.41*	25.08	22.00	23.77	20.40*
SSHA Study Orientation	89.65	73.69*	102.85	85.33	94.05	78.15**

*p<.05
**p<.01

Table II
Educational History Item Means for Males, Females, and Total Group

	Males		Females		Total	
	Pass	Fail	Pass	Fail	Pass	Fail
Semesters Completed this college	3.77	4.03	4.00	3.00	3.83	3.64
Semesters Completed all college work	5.46	4.27	4.92	4.00	5.28	4.17
Credits completed all college work	33.62	35.59	37.38	25.78	34.87	34.30
Overall GPA, this college	1.46	1.43	1.37	1.28	1.43	1.37
Overall GPA, all college work	1.62	1.49	1.60	1.56	1.62	1.52
First term GPA, this college	1.64	1.60	1.14	1.23	1.48	1.46
GPA last term attended, this college	1.41	1.16	1.44	1.59	1.42	1.33
Percentile rank, H.S. class	60.71	60.46	44.17	47.94	55.19	55.73

Table III
Number of Males, Females,and Total Group Who Passed
Or Failed by Marital Status

	Males		Females		Total	
	Pass	Fail	Pass	Fail	Pass	Fail
Married	6	0	3	0	9	0
Single	20	29	12	16	32	45

*p<.05

Table IV

Number of Males, Females, and Total Group Who Passed Or
Failed By Time Spent Since Last in College

	Males		Females		Total	
	Pass	Fail	Pass	Fail	Pass	Fail
Worked	25	24	11	8	36	32
Loafed	0	3	0	2	0	5
Other (Part-time Work and/or part-time study)	1	1	2	8	3	9

*p<.05

Table V
Number of Males, Females, and Total Group Who Passed Or
Failed By Reported Concern About Financing a
College Education

	Males		Females		Total	
	Pass	Fail	Pass	Fail	Pass	Fail
No Concern	6	11	1	9	7	20
Some Concern	15	13	9	7	24	20
Major Concern	5	5	3	2	8	7

*p< .05

Table VI
Number of Males, Females, and Total Group Who Passed Or Failed By Birth Order

	Males		Females		Total	
	Pass	Fail	Pass	Fail	Pass	Fail
Only child	5	4	1	1	6	5
First child	9	8	6	6	15	14
Second child	5	11	1	7	6	18
Third child	2	4	1	3	3	7
Fourth or later child	5	2	4	1	9	3

*p< .05

TABLE VII
Student Opinions About Factors Which Contributed To
Their Previous Academic Failure

Factor	Very Important	Important	Minor Importance	Not Important
Could Not Get Desired Program of Study				
Pass	6	4	15	14
Fail	2	7	11	27
Dissatisfied with Instructors or Teaching Methods*				
Pass	3	11	12	13
Fail	1	4	24	17
Dissatisfied with Academic Advisement*				
Pass	5	2	10	21
Fail	0	5	19	23
Too Many Personal Problems*				
Pass	7	9	12	11
Fail	0	12	13	22
Dissatisfied with BCC				
Pass	3	4	9	23
Fail	0	1	8	38
Unhappy with Chosen Major				
Pass	1	5	6	27
Fail	2	5	4	36
Personal Health Problems				
Pass	2	4	3	30
Fail	2	3	5	37
Illness in Family or Other Family Problems				
Pass	3	5	55	26
Fail	3	1	4	39
No Clearly Defined Goals				
Pass	8	11	10	10
Fail	6	12	10	19
Too Many Extra-curricular Activities				
Pass	3	4	10	22
Fail	3	5	10	25
Irregular Class Attendance				
Pass	2	5	11	21
Fail	5	11	12	19
Did Not Study Enough				
Pass	11	21	6	1
Fail	21	17	7	2

*$p<.05$